

Inaugural Address

Christianity and Church
History

Matthew Spinka

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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PROFESSOR MATTHEW SPINKA, M. A., B. D.

*Herman Rust Professor of Church History
in Central Theological Seminary of the
Reformed Church in the United States.*

Delivered before the Ohio Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States, during its Ninety-seventh Annual Session, in Wilson Avenue Reformed Church, Columbus, Ohio, Thursday evening, October 7, 1920. ~ ~ ~

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Program

Rev. Henry J. Christman, D. D.,
President Central Theological Seminary, Presiding.

Prelude

Invocation

Anthem

Scripture Reading, Rev. E. D. Wettach, D. D., Member Board of
Trustees.

Gloria Patri

Prayer, Rev. E. M. Beck, Secretary Board of Visitors

Charge to the Professor Elect, Prof. F. W. Kennedy, Dean Heidelberg
University, Member Board of Visitors

Induction into Office, Rev. J. P. Stahl, D. D., President Board of
Visitors

Hymn

Inaugural Address, "Christianity and Church History," Prof. Mat-
thew Spinka, M. A., B. D.

Doxology

Benediction

CHARGE TO THE PROFESSOR ELECT

By DEAN KENNEDY

MY DEAR BROTHER SPINKA:—One year ago this Synod, on the unanimous recommendation of the Executive Committee of the Board of Visitors of Central Theological Seminary, without a dissenting vote, chose you to be the Professor of Church History. You have accepted this call, we trust, as coming from God and have signified your willingness to consecrate yourself to the office of teaching as a life-work. In thus entering upon your work, you are indeed to be congratulated, not only on account of the unbounded confidence of this Synod but also because of the unusual opportunity that has been placed in your hands.

By way of reminding you of the reasonable expectations of this Synod from you, permit me to mention briefly a few of the factors that determined your selection. You were chosen, for one reason, because you are a *young man*. "The glory of a young man is his strength." You have the vigor of body, the versatility and keenness and alertness of mind that accompany the earlier years of a normal, human life. You have every reason to look forward to a long period of service in this field wherein you should become increasingly useful as the years roll on. The office to which you have been chosen can best be filled by one who has grown into it and has had abundant time for research, reflection, and discipline of mind.

Again, you were selected because you seemed to this Synod to be possessed with a mind peculiarly fitted both by training and temperament to *teach*—and particularly to teach the difficult subjects placed in your hands. The true teacher of Theology is born a teacher. He may be improved by training and experience but he must be gifted with the power of understanding the mental and spiritual difficulties of the student and must be able to meet these difficulties if he is to succeed. It was felt, then, by those who selected you to this work that you possessed the vital enthusiasm and the mental and moral discernment that should qualify you to be not only a scholar in the real sense of that word but above all else a teacher—able to impart both knowledge and enthusiasm and understanding to the students placed in your care.

Certainly no secondary consideration was given in your selection to the measure of your spirituality. For, to be a true historian of the Church and its teachings, intellectuality must ever be under the guidance of a mind controlled and directed by the Spirit of Truth. No one who has not fellowship with Him who is the *Truth* can discern the movement of the Spirit of Truth within the troubled waters of human history.

These reasons, among others which might be mentioned, im-

pelled this Synod therefore to commit this important trust to your hands. And these reasons suggest the most weighty considerations which you should take to heart as you contemplate the duties which you are now officially to assume and the vows which you now undertake to perform.

I charge you, therefore, to be true to the office of Teaching. You have been selected and are to be set apart not only to delve into the truth for your own intellectual satisfaction and mental pleasure, but also, and especially that you may impart to the young people who sit at your feet that knowledge that will make them able to know and understand the great things that God has wrought through men in the past and so to render them qualified to go out to become inspirers of others. That is to say, that you are never to forget that with all your learning and with all your teaching, you are to remember that your chief product is to be true ministers of Christ trained and instructed so to use their knowledge as to bring unto men the everlasting Gospel. If your teaching shall result in merely making scholars; if your investigations shall result in merely whetting your own intellectual appetite for knowledge without spiritual understanding, your achievements, distinguished as they may be from some points of view, will fail of their true end and purpose. Whatever else you do, therefore, magnify your *teaching*, and may your chief joys be in the development of those precious human souls that you shall influence for time and for eternity.

I charge you, in the second place, to be true to the Church and the Synod which have not only signally honored you but have also placed within your hands such a sacred trust. In assuming this position, it is presumed that you have carefully and prayerfully considered the vows you are to make and the obligations to be assumed. For they are of no ordinary importance and seriousness. I take it that no reasonable member of this Synod expects any formal statement of doctrine to be an intellectual straight-jacket for any minister of the gospel or teacher of theology. But, the Synod may reasonably expect of all those who take upon themselves such sacred obligations as are here laid down, both intellectual honesty and moral conviction in their interpretation of those truths that lie at the base of the evangelical faith. The impulsiveness and mental vivacity of youth should be chastened and sobered by constant contact with the great lessons which the experience of the Church teaches us when we calmly listen to the words of admonition which come out of the past. Remember that Truth is eternal even though the furnishings may alter as the ages come and go.

Finally, I charge you to take heed unto the necessity of growth in grace as well as in the knowledge of things spiritual. Your work will, by its own peculiar nature, bring to you peculiar tempta-

tions which will be as subtle as they are destructive of spiritual power. Like the Savior you will be placed upon the pinnacle of opportunity and privilege only to be tempted to cast yourself down upon the rocks through the drawing power of the false praise of men and the insidious influence of personal pride. You must, therefore, constantly cultivate within yourself the spirit of child-like humility and reliance upon our common source of power which will enable you to lead a life of simplicity and spiritual devotion before all men and especially before your students who will inevitably become a part of you because of their daily contact with you. To send these men out Spirit-filled, you must be filled with the Spirit yourself. For your streams of influence will flow no higher than their source. Be true to Christ, therefore, not merely as the Great Teacher, but also as the constant Companion of your life. May His Life grow in you more and more, becoming the power whence flows all your words and ways. And may He crown you with abundant success as you witness to your students and the world of the greatness and the grandeur of His Everlasting Truth.

In the name of this Synod, I bespeak for you the most hearty sympathy, co-operation, and fellowship in this great work which you are now officially to assume. May the great Head of the Church keep and preserve you in strength of body and mind through a long and useful life; may your influence and power for good in the Church increase with the passing years; and may the relation here established contribute to the growth of the Kingdom of Righteousness and to the glory of our Heavenly Teacher and Guide.

INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Christianity and Church History

By PROFESSOR SPINKA

DEAR FATHERS AND BRETHREN:—It is fitting that the present moment, significant to this reverend body and most solemn in the life of the present speaker, should be devoted to a discussion of some normative and regulative principle, necessary to the deeper understanding and interpretation of the truths of Christianity. As such I venture to suggest the subject of "Christianity and Church History."

If, first of all, we apply ourselves to the definition of our terms, we find that the concept of the "Church"—in our present usage—can not be defined in any such theological terms as "the totality of the elect," for the simple and obvious reason that we can not, or dare not, determine who the elect of any particular age were. Moreover, it would be presumptuous for us to anticipate the final judgments of the Great Judge; our task is merely that of recording and interpreting the movements of history. We must, therefore, necessarily include in our concept that larger and more tangible company which throughout the ages comprised the visible, or even merely the officially recognized, Christian Church. Thus at the very outset we perceive that our concepts of the Church and of the spirit of Christianity may not always coincide, as, in reality, they often did not coincide. Such a Church, then, was composed of men and women, many of whom were saints, and many others who were sinners, and most of whom were a mixture of both. There were men like Francis of Assisi, whose Christ-like lives were God's little poems, revealing what a divine thing the human life can become; while there were others whose bloody deeds proclaim them to have been nearer to the Pit than to the Gospel of Love. Thus Church History, being no respecter of persons, speaks not only of Thomas a Kempis and John Hus, but also mentions Benedict IX of infamous memory, who, as pope, disgraced the papal throne—if that were possible to do after the many choice scoundrels who had preceded him. On the pages of Church History John Calvin, to his great horror, might find himself side by side with the Duke of Alva and with Arminius, and Jonathan Edwards jostle Torquemada in the crowd.

Moreover, for the sake of impartiality, we must include even such a man as James I. of England, for the part he played at the Hampton Court Conference, though we may concur with the contemporary judgment that he was "the wisest fool in Christendom"; and we must place him face to face with those self-same Pilgrim Fathers whom he undertook to "harry out of his kingdom." Therefore, at the very outset I wish to make it plain that under the designation of "the Church" we shall include indiscriminately all those who stood in an official, recognized relation to the organization which claimed to represent and perpetuate the spirit of Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, we must ever express our deepest regrets that Church History can give us but an inadequate glimpse of the multitudes of faithful and devoted believers whose humble lot did not bring them to the notice of the historian; and yet, these had "trials and mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were tempted, they were slain with the sword: they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins: being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, (of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves, and the holes of the earth." These mute, inglorious heroes of the Faith the ungrateful posterity does not remember, for in this world of ours "many a flower is born to blush unseen and waste its sweetness on the desert air."

Ours is the task, then, a thankless one, of chronicling the outward, corporate, political life of the Church, for the divine life which dwells in the hearts of believing men is recorded only in the Book of Life, which no mortal man was ever permitted to read.

The other two terms, i. e., history, and Christianity, need no extended explanation. By "history" I do not mean a recital of a succession of events arranged in chronological order, but that term signifies to me the interplay of cause and effect, and the growth and development of the various forces constituting the course of events. But I wish not to be understood to mean some mechanistic scheme of things, by which this world could be construed in accordance with the analogy of a freight train, the caboose of which is drawn by the car ahead, which in turn is pulled by the car ahead, and so on *ad infinitum*; and should some inquisitive body ask us for a "primal mover," on this scheme we would have to answer that there is no "primal mover," there is no engine, there is nothing but an infinite number of cars ahead of the last one. Neither do I wish to be accused of any such theory as Mr. Buckle advocates in his "History of Civilization in England," wherein not men or institutions, but fixed, immutable laws of nature govern the course of events. On the basis of this rigidly mathematical theory the author tries to prove the possibility of predicting the necessary

course of events in human history, as, for instance, the eclipse of the sun can be predicted. Nor do I wish to commit myself to any such fatalistic view of history as Tolstoy, in his "Voyna i Mir" ("War and Peace") portrayed with such profound art. He conceives history as an onward rush of inevitable, quasi-impersonal social movements, of which men are as it were unconscious tools. Thus the old General Kutuzov does not direct or bring about the crushing defeat of Napoleon at the battle of Borodino; he merely functions as a tool of the Inevitable Movement of Fate. Carlyle, on the other hand, postulates the opposite interpretation, that great men produce great eras. In distinction to these views, it seems to me that the genetic view of history, which uses the categories of life and organic growth as terms of interpretation of the complex phenomena of history, presents least difficulty.

Christianity, finally, could be defined, in short, as a life animated and directed by the spirit of the Living Christ. It may be helpful to quote St. Augustine's maxim in this connection: "*Dilige et quod vis fac*,"—if you but love (God), you may do as you incline, for Augustine believes that you will then of necessity incline in the right direction. Or, in other words, Christianity is a life, directed not only by the express teachings of Christ in the Gospels, but also by His principles, testified to by His living Spirit, by which are to be determined such matters as were not directly taught by our Divine Master in the days of His flesh.

From this introductory treatment of the theme it is evident that history of the Church is not always identical with Christianity, and, in fact, can be diametrically opposed to it. Thus the problem could be formulated either as Church History versus Christianity, or Church History identical with Christianity, or Church History as embodying Christianity in lesser or greater degree. Which of these relations does Church History sustain to Christianity, and what is to be our standard of judgment, according to which to solve this problem?

There are several typical answers to this question, some of which I beg leave to recount. In the first place, there is the common theory, held, I suppose, by the greater part of Christendom—numerically speaking—that the Church is a divine repository of the faith received from the Lord and His apostles, which faith she held inviolate and without the least fundamental change throughout the ages. Our first impression upon hearing this sentiment is that of grandeur and authority. Before our mental eyes loom the venerable figures of such defenders of the apostolic tradition and the unity of the Christian Catholic Church as were Irenaeus, and especially Cyprian of Carthage, who with his "*Extra ecclesiam, nemo salvatur*" waged war against all who dared to suggest a possibility of an independent interpretation. Here is a church which claims to lead us to the very fountain-head of truth; amid

the change and decay of empires and peoples, mutations of science and philosophy, she stands firmly upon the basis of that which "has been held always, everywhere, and by all."

But it needs only a slight acquaintance with the history of the Church to find ourselves rudely disillusioned of such a grandiose dream. This slight acquaintance, however, is not generally possessed by the ordinary person, for whom everything between the Acts of the Apostles and the acts of his grandfather is enshrouded in utter darkness. This audience, however, knows that there was probably no institution so chameleon-like as the Roman Catholic Church, which is a perfect wonder in adapting itself to its surroundings; and as for the Greek communion, with its gorgeous ceremonials and its spiritual deadness withal, there surely is but little to remind us of the original purity and simplicity of the Apostolic Church. How can anyone speak of holding inviolate the original reposit of the faith, if he once faces squarely such a study as that of the pre-Nicene and the Nicene period? Who can ever hope to understand the subtle thought of that momentous age without a generous study of Greek philosophy? Do we not find it impossible to express the thought of the age without using such original words as "*homoousios*" and "*hypostasis*"? The whole discussion of the Christological problem is so thoroughly saturated with Hellenic philosophical and psychological concepts that a poor Saint Peter—I dare say—would find himself strangely perplexed as to this "original reposit of the faith." Is it necessary to point out the various heresies of the Roman bishops, for instance the monothelitic heresy of Pope Honorius I., which was repeatedly condemned by his successors and finally by the Sixth General Council in 680? When heresy is found in the highest places, what becomes of the infallibility of the pope, or of any talk of preserving inviolate the original faith? It would be useless to spend our time in elaborating a fact well known to all, that the Church of the Middle Ages appropriated Aristotle so thoroughly that he, a pagan philosopher, became THE philosopher of the Church. But will someone try to convince us that no fundamental change was wrought thereby? And what shall we say of all the heathen influences which played upon the Church, either coarsening the earlier lofty and spiritual conceptions, such as that of the Lord's Supper, which was degraded by the dogma of transubstantiation; or introducing heathen notions outright, such as the whole ascetic idea of monasticism, which worked on the theory that the more miserable you are the more God loves you; or that of the worship of relics and the saints, the adoration and worship of the Virgin Mary, and a whole host of other similar practices? Will someone take upon himself the heroic task of proving that the dogma of papal infallibility introduced no change, when the fact that the Council of Constance represented a triumphant assertion

of the opposite theory, namely, that a general council is superior to the pope, stares him in the face?

Contrary to this static view, with its clumsy claim of immutability, is the genetic view, emphasizing life and growth, and thus the implicated concomitant of change. "For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed," said the Master, "which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is less than all his seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and lodge in the branches thereof." "So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how. The earth beareth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear." On the basis of this view we need not bewail the fact that the Apostolic Church did not always remain a grain of mustard seed, but grew into a mighty tree which soon will spread its branches over the face of the whole world. Nor can we expect that the outward form will remain unchanged and immutable, for we are told expressly that it will be "first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear." It would be ridiculous to see a full-grown man wearing the swaddling clothes of his infancy. This whole process of growth requires change and development, but this, far from being a matter of regret, is a matter earnestly to be desired, provided that an extreme caution be taken that all the shoots of the tree are from the self-same Gospel mustard seed, and no parasitic noxious weeds be permitted among them. In other words, we must take heed that the changing and developing forms of the life of the Church express the spirit of our Lord and Master.

If this simple parable of the Great Teacher were kept in mind and adhered to, what a host of distracting problems would be settled! Take for instance the controversy about the form of baptism; the very question which usually forms the basis of such a discussion betrays a totally erroneous conception of the subject: what form of baptism is of absolutely binding force? Is it immersion or sprinkling? On the basis of the static theory, wherein no growth is recognized, only one answer is possible: the more primitive form would have to be adhered to as of an absolutely binding force. But on the genetic view, in which we do not recognize any absolute, but only relative, forms, we have a perfect right to ask: what of it if the form did outgrow the primitive custom and changed to baptism by sprinkling, as long as it is the sign of the self-same and all-important grace? Were it not better that we stress the grace instead of the form? Besides, if we were to be literalists, why not go the whole length, and since every example of actual baptism mentioned in the Acts and the Epistles of Paul, (i. e., where the formula is included), is a baptism "into the name

of Jesus" only, and not a baptism "into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit," would not consistency compel such a literalist to follow the example of the primitive Apostolic Church in this important respect also?

To take another example: one of the greatest obstacles in the way of union of the Protestant churches is the question whether the primitive polity recognized two orders—presbyters and deacons—or three orders, adding that of bishops. The episcopal churches make a great deal of the so-called "apostolic succession," although the Apostles were not bishops, and their office differed widely from that of the bishops. Personally, I find evidence preponderatingly in favor of the two-office theory; namely, that deacons and presbyters were the only officers of the primitive church, while the name "bishop" (*episcopos*—overseer) refers to the presiding presbyter. But even though we proved to the full satisfaction of all that this was the primitive polity of the Church, yet we must admit that this system proved itself inadequate in the struggle which the Church waged against Gnosticism, and therefore was superseded by the three-office polity, when the Church believed it expedient to elevate the office of the bishop into a normative and regulative one.

Therefore, in view of these facts which plainly show that the primitive Church did not consider herself tied down irrevocably to any particular forms, but felt free to change them in order to meet the demand of the times, I plead for an essential freedom from BONDAGE to these and all other forms. For "the letter killeth, the Spirit giveth life!" It seems to me that if we are to make any essential progress toward unity of Christendom, or at least, of Protestantism, we must adopt some such principle.

If the foregoing diagnosis be correct, namely, that we are living in a growing and developing world, then this conception implies that we are constantly outgrowing the old forms of thought and expression.

"Our little systems have their day;
They have their day and cease to be:
They are but broken lights of Thee
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

Or as Carlyle expressed it long ago: "Church History, did it speak but wisely, would have momentous secrets to teach us: nay, in its highest degree it were a sort of continued Holy Writ; our Sacred Books being, indeed, only a history of the primeval Church, as it first arose in man's soul, and symbolically embodied itself in his external life." The God of Abraham and Isaac, of Saint Paul and Augustine, is not dead; He was the God of John Calvin and of the Pilgrim Fathers, and is the God of the men of this present age; neither has He left us without a witness of His continuous presence, but speaks to our souls daily, if we only would listen.

"For He is not far from each one of us: for in Him we live, and move, and have our being."

Now if that be true—as it undoubtedly is—the lesson of the "Chambered Nautilus" is still in point:

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!"

For must we confess that our faith is less vital than that of the generations past? Is our Christian consciousness so weak and feeble that we must repeat an expression of the faith of our fathers, instead of giving vent to the deepest experiences of our own souls? Can we not say in our own words and in the thought-forms of the present day what in the inmost heart of our hearts we hold vital and mighty? As Professor A. T. Robertson expressed the same thought in a recent number of a popular homiletical magazine: "The confession that carries weight today, as of old, is that which bears witness to what Jesus has done for the speaker. It is the living Christ who is Lord of life and death. One's creed should not be an academic declamation or declaration, but the burning conviction out of the crucible of his own experience."

It is not my intention to condemn the old; I merely wish to suggest the propriety of re-stating in new terms that which is eternally true. The Apostles' Creed—an expression of Christian consciousness honored by the greater part of Christendom—had its origin in a short baptismal formula known as the Old Roman Symbol; but it grew and continued to expand until the beginning of the eighth century found it in the present form. Every great struggle of the Church left, as it were a scar, permanently preserved in that ancient "regula fidei," and each successive generation of believers added to it what was vital and important of the deepest life of its age. Thus, the Apostles' Creed was a growing creed, for it was an expression of a living Church. Only a living thing can grow, but whatever is living *must* grow. Woe to the Church that stops growing! It is a sign of death, and a dead thing will not keep. As Goethe has it:

"Grau, theurer Freund, ist alle Theorie,
Und gruen des Lebens gold'ner Baum."

Thus no creed can be considered as the final and absolute expression of Christian consciousness, because that consciousness is growing and vital, dynamic, and because that consciousness must use, as a medium of expression, thought-forms of its day, which, being temporal and mutable, are subject to the law of life—an everlasting change. An illustration will serve to make my thought clearer: suppose one of us found in his garden, while digging—let us say—for fish-worms, a hidden treasure of Spanish gold ducats of the days of Philip II. The effigy would speak to us of the glories of a king upon whose dominions the sun never set. And yet, his

cold, stern features merely recall to us days that are long gone by, and a world that is dead. The intrinsic value of the gold is permanent, but its particular coinage is obsolete. In order to make the ducats current legal tender, we must have them recast into the coin-forms of today.

Another thought which occurs in connection with the developmental concept of history is, whether it is possible to add any new values to those already contained in the sum-total of the cosmic worth or, in other words, whether there is a possibility of bringing forth something which has not been there before. The Preacher would pessimistically commit us to the philosophy that "there is nothing new under the sun." Likewise, an idealistic philosopher of the Hegelian school would have a hard time proving that there is any real progress in the world at all, since, according to his view, contradictions and discords, i. e., in plain English, all evil, are merely apparent. Every thesis differentiates from itself its own antithesis, that is, evil, and both are harmonized in their common synthesis. The highest synthesis is the perfect Absolute, in which all good and evil are harmonized. Evil is merely an imperfect, or limited, aspect of good. Thus, as Hegel expressed himself about Schelling's "Identitaet-System," the Absolute, "is a Night in which all cows are black." "I accept the Universe," was the gist of the whole philosophy of Margaret Fuller, our own New England transcendentalist. People of that peculiar type of mind who make good Christian Science victims, before they succumb, are likely to express themselves in the words of Browning: "God is in His heaven, all is well with the world." But

"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Some of us think that there must be something radically wrong with a world in which the tragedy of the Great War of 1914 could occur, a world in which half of the human race was born into squalid, abject poverty without the aid of a physician, and where one billion souls live without the knowledge of their Savior and their Heavenly Father.

"as if Jesus never lived,
And as if He never died."

If all were well with the world, why worry about the teeming millions of Japan, China, India, and Africa? Moreover, how do the multitudes of Europe manage to die of starvation in a world in which "all is well?" Why our anxious thought that America might die of overfeeding and choke herself in the fat of her selfishness? Oh, there must be room for some other interpretation, which would give us a chance to roll up our sleeves and go to redeeming the wastes of this world.

Now, if history is a development, then this world is still in the making, and we have a chance to improve it. This is a world in

the rough, and God is engaged in chiseling the details into perfection, using us as His tools. This genetic philosophy of history is nothing new, for even the Hebrews of old held "that God is working out in history His moral purposes in the world;" but we make the important addition that He is not working through some elect nation, but through every one of US. History is His story, as someone remarked; but we are the agents through whom He carries out His moral purposes, we are co-laborers with God! If there be a nation in bondage, without some Moses that nation will not be led out! It is our task to carry out the plans of God, of converting the desert wastes into blossoming gardens, of banishing ignorance, poverty, and vice, of shattering into pieces the mud-gods of the world, and of reconciling men to God! He calls us to lend ourselves as willing instruments for the bringing of the Kingdom of God upon the earth, and as messengers of His everlasting Gospel of Love to all nations! What an immense task, and what a glorious privilege!

Finally, we come to the point which we raised at the beginning of this discussion: if we work on this principle of a growing and developing world, will it not lend itself to individualistic, subjective interpretation, and will not many go astray? The answer has already been given: most assuredly it will. There are many who went astray, and if we look about us at the present day we find many who lost the straight and narrow path, for our day is bewildered with the most diverse interpretations as to what Christianity really means. But that does not prove that we must abandon the fundamental idea of development; it only argues for a regulative, normative principle. There is no question that life is fraught with dangers; but once a man is born it is too late to avoid the risks inherent in life, and there is nothing to do but either to face them or to resign the trust of life. And still, most of us take the chance. Life is an adventure, and God is trusting us a great deal when He commits the immortal soul into our keeping. There are untold numbers of people who disappointed God's trust in them, and made a most sorry mess of their lives. And still God continues to trust us with this priceless gift—life. Furthermore, if God wished to save us without our consent, and without our free choice of the way of life eternal, no soul would probably be lost, but we could entertain a doubt whether such souls would be worth saving, for every one of them would be deprived of the inestimable glory of being a free, moral agent. Like a constitutional king, we "could do no wrong," but there would be no virtue in it. A pig can do no wrong, either, for a pig is not a moral agent. If Christ had preached his Gospel himself to all the world, undoubtedly He would have avoided the blunders that his human disciples committed; but he deliberately chose the Twelve as His co-laborers, and entrusted His mission into their hands, that "apart from us,

they (who do not know God) should not be made perfect." And you must remember that among His disciples there was a Judas Iscariot, and a Peter, who, with a curse on his lips, denied His Lord before a servant girl. Mistakes and blunders are the lot of every human being, for without the possibility of falling into sin there is no virtue, and without the possibility of making a mistake there is no action whatever. We are living in a world where it is better to dare to do something at the risk of making a mistake, rather than do nothing at all for fear of blundering. That would be the greatest blunder of all.

Thus what we need is a standard, a regulative principle, by which to "test the spirits whether they be of God." That principle is not far to seek: it is the spirit of the Living Christ. We worship an ever living and an ever present Christ, not a man Jesus who lived some twenty centuries ago. He is with us, as He was with His company of Apostles, to guide, direct, teach, and lead us. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Quakers spoke of being led by the "inner light." That was no poetry, no figure of speech, and no fanaticism. It was and is the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and was no monopoly of the Quakers; for this light still "lighteth every man coming into the world."

This, then, we propose as the regulative principle, by which to determine what in the subject-matter of Church History is truly Christian and what is not. This conclusion is so simple and self-evident, that it would seem like an inexcusable trifling to subject you to such a long discussion for the sake of such a meagre and self-evident result. And yet I am confident that this plain truth needs to be emphasized as persistently as ever, for this self-evident test is not always, in fact, very seldom, recognized as normative. A strange confusion of thought prevails about this point, and it would seem that everything else is usually resorted to as normative—tradition, principle of papal authority, distorted Scripture quotations—rather than the spirit of Christ. Therefore, we maintain that it is better to run the risks of appearing trite, rather than to take for granted that this is too self-evident to need extended proof.

It is a common fact, however, that this principle of the "inner light" often lent itself to all sorts of vagaries and all kinds of purely subjectivistic interpretations. That, however, is an instance of an abuse of a good principle to which every good thing is liable. It would be strange indeed, however, if the voice of the living Christ, speaking to an individual heart, were not found, as a rule, in essential agreement with the recorded utterances of Christ in the Gospels, and with the general Christian consciousness of His Church of the present day. This voice will not contradict itself, and will be heard by more than one. This consideration lessens the dangers of pure subjectivity and the abuse to which the principle is open, and thus avoids a merely individualistic interpretation

of the view. The regulative and normative principle, by which we are to judge whether a matter be of the spirit of Christ or not, is not left to the mercy of pure subjectivism, but is determined by the three-fold test: the individual conscientious conviction, or the voice of Christ speaking to the heart of man, the spirit of the Gospels, and the consensus of the Christian consciousness of the day.

And now, in conclusion, allow me to recapitulate our argument. The problem which we set before us was that of determining the relation of Church History to Christianity. We saw that Christianity and Church History are not synonymous terms, but that the history of the Church comprises movements, teachings, and lives of men, sustaining all degrees of consonance or dissonance with Christianity, from the lowest pitch to the highest. Moreover, in our search for a standard of judgment as to what is true to the spirit of Christianity and what is not, we tried to set forth the genetic philosophy of history as the one more conformable to the facts of history than any other interpretation. This led us to regard as the standard of judgment the spirit of the living Christ, which is cognizable in the individual consciousness, in the Gospels, and in the consensus of the body of believers.

May the realization of our sublime privilege as co-laborers with God, and of the truth that a world is either to be moulded and transformed by and through us, or Christ's glorious conception of the Kingdom of God will not be realized, inspire us to a whole-hearted and absolute surrender of ourselves to the great purposes of God! And may we consecrate our body, soul, and spirit to the great ideal of the bringing of the Kingdom of our Lord upon the earth, and to the task of spreading His gospel over the width and breadth of the globe! For the Gospel of Christ is the only hope of a world perishing in sin, and without Christ its doom is sealed. God calls us, as He called the Crusaders of old, to fight the forces of darkness; may this be a day in which we consecrate anew our lives, our powers, and our all!

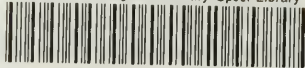
"Onward, Christian soldiers!
Marching as to war;
With the cross of Jesus
Going on before!
Christ, the Royal Master
Leads against the foe;
Forward into battle,
See His banners go!

Crowns and thrones may perish,
Kingdoms rise and wane,
But the Church of Jesus
Constant will remain:
Gates of hell can never
'Gainst that Church prevail:
We have Christ's own promise,
And that can not fail."



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